



EPISCOPAL NEWS SERVICE

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For immediate release

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Episcopal News Service

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Presiding Bishop and Council of Advice disassociate themselves from ordination of gay priest in Newark

The Most Rev. Edmond L. Browning, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, and his Council of Advice, comprised of bishops from the church's nine provinces, issued a statement February 20 "disassociating" themselves from the December ordination of an openly gay, non-celibate priest in the Diocese of Newark.

Bishop John Spong ordained Robert Williams in a very public and controversial ceremony in Hoboken to serve as director of The Oasis, a diocesan ministry with gays and lesbians. Five weeks later Williams resigned, in the wake of disparaging comments about celibacy and monogamy he made at a conference in Detroit. Spong has asked Williams to keep silent and not function as a priest while the diocese looks into the possibility that Williams misrepresented himself during the ordination process, which would be grounds for asking Williams to resign the priesthood.

"We regret the hurt and confusion caused for many members of the church by the ordination and by subsequent events," the statement said. "We believe that good order is not served when bishops, dioceses, or parishes act unilaterally."

The statement pointed out that the disassociation is from the ordination itself, not from "the many members of our church who are gay and lesbian," whose lives have been affirmed by the church and whose "presence" and "service within the church" are valued.

The statement calls attention to a resolution passed at the 1979 General Convention which affirms "the traditional teaching of the church on marriage, marital fidelity and sexual chastity as the standard of Christian sexual morality" and expects candidates for ordination to conform to this standard. "Therefore, we believe it is not appropriate for this church to ordain a practicing homosexual, or

any other person who is engaged in heterosexual relations outside of marriage," the resolution said.

While the Episcopal Church, through its commission on health and human affairs, continues to study issues around sexuality, the action of the Bishop of Newark "has polarized our community of faith," making the dialogue on issues more difficult, the bishops contend.

The statement, coming after considerable consultation with church leaders, was issued "to clear up any confusion created by the ordination and in an effort to promote dialogue and stop the polarization," said Presiding Bishop Browning in an interview. "We are eager to support the commission on health and human affairs as it deals creatively with the issues around human sexuality," he added. "And we are deeply concerned that it will be more difficult now to deal with those issues sensitively when so much attention is focused on events in Newark," Browning added. "The statement is an attempt to deal with some of the anger and pain that resulted from the ordination--and to bring the deeper issues back into focus."

(Full text of statement in News features section.)

Presiding Bishop expresses joy at release of Nelson Mandela, calls on South Africa to end state of emergency and release political detainees

Presiding Bishop Edmond L. Browning, primate of the Episcopal Church in the USA, said in a statement released February 11 that he "shares in the joy of millions of people in South Africa and around the globe" that Nelson Mandela has finally been released.

"We have prayed and worked with the anti-apartheid movement for many years to see this day arrive, a day that vindicates the right of all South Africans to have full participation in the country of their birth," Browning said in the statement. He warned that it is "premature" to think that apartheid is gone and he called for continued economic pressures on South Africa.

While expressing "gratitude" to President de Klerk "for his leadership and good judgment in taking this action," Browning said the South African president should be encouraged to "continue on this bold new course" by ending the state of emergency and releasing all political detainees. "I pray that President de Klerk will have the courage to lead his government to a peaceful transition on the road to a non-racial, democratic society. And I pray that it be done swiftly," Browning concluded.

The presiding bishop also wrote letters to Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, President de Klerk and President George Bush. In his letter to de Klerk he expressed gratitude on behalf of the Episcopal Church for the release of Mandela and offered prayers that the president would "continue to be strengthened to meet the challenges that your bold initiatives will create and that you have the courage to lead your government toward a democratic society." To Mandela he promised that the Episcopal Church would "remain vigilant for the task that lies ahead. We shall stand firm as we join hands in the final wave of energy that will be required to bring down once and for all the evil that is apartheid."

Episcopal Life prepares first issue for April

NEW YORK, FEB. 21--Episcopal Life, the new national newspaper of the Episcopal Church, will be published beginning with the April issue according to its editor.

The monthly tabloid, which will be distributed both independently and in a printing partnership with regional newspapers in 18 dioceses, appears as the successor to The Episcopalian, an independently edited publication produced from Philadelphia, which closes its doors this month.

Episcopal Life editor Jerrold Hames says the new publication will be "bright, informative and challenging with news and features reporting on events and issues in the church and society." A center-section, called Lifelines, will highlight a particular aspect of the mission and ministry of the church.

The editorial offices of Episcopal Life will be located at the Episcopal Church Center, 815 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10017. The advertising and circulation offices will be located at Suite 1201, 1200 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107-4101.

Editorial staff appointments are expected to be announced by March 1. The advertising director is William Griffiths, who worked in a similar capacity for The Episcopalian. Dorothy Kelso continues as advertising manager and Anita Spence as circulation director, according to Hames.

Episcopal parishes are evaluating Supplemental Liturgical Texts

Some 735 parishes and missions in 70 dioceses of the Episcopal Church are participating in the evaluation of the Supplemental Liturgical Texts (Prayer Book Studies 30) being developed by the Standing Liturgical Commission.

The texts are authorized for use, with permission of the diocesan bishop, through the General Convention next summer. The evaluation began in Advent of 1989 and will continue until Pentecost 1990 when the evaluation forms are due. The committee expects to receive a substantial response and share results in early September.

"The response by the church seems to indicate great interest in the texts," said Bishop Vincent Pettit, chair of the standing commission. "The dialogue happening throughout the church shows just how important it is for our prayers to reflect the stretching and growth in our lives."

Use of the texts has varied among dioceses, with some parishes using them during certain seasons, during weekday services, or during diocesan conventions. Some dioceses have held workshops or used the texts at clergy conferences.

Canon Lloyd Casson, convenor of the committee, said that the supplemental texts "are addressing issues raised by 'sexist' language but we are emphasizing something different also, offering biblical imagery for God to add to our range of relationships with God in prayer, rather than subtracting from that relationship."

(Based on a report from Sarah Motley)



news features

Episcopalians in Virginia find their involvement in a coal strike a time of both crucifixion and resurrection

(Editor's Note: Coal miners voted February 19 to ratify a new contract with the Pittston Coal Group, ending a bitter 10-month strike that divided communities, families--and churches. This is the story of a few Episcopalians in Virginia who were caught in the turmoil.)

by Mary Lee Simpson

For Episcopalians supporting coal miners and their families in the strike against the Pittston Company, their involvement has been a true biblical experience including not only a triumphant Palm Sunday, but also a lonely crucifixion and now a resurrection.

As Appalachia communities still wait for the final contract settlement so people can return to work, Linda Johnson and Liz Rose continue to deal with the day-to-day struggles of their neighbors. The two live and work out of Grace House, an Episcopal learning and training center in that ministers to the need of families in the heart of the coal fields.

"This has been one of the most incredible biblical experiences in my life," reflected a weary and devastated Johnson. "I know that any time we follow the Gospel there's a price to pay. I'm just surprised that the price has been so high."

She recalled the "Palm Sunday" when the group of people from within

and without the diocese gathered to make their witness on the picket line at the Moss Three coal preparation plant.

"We met at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in St. Paul, and drove in a caravan to the site of the plant, but because of the traffic and people almost blocking the highway, we had to walk the final half mile."

As the band of about 25 clergy and laypersons made their way up to the main gate, the crowd began to part, and the people cheered, clapped, and gave them the thumbs-up sign. All she could think of was Jesus' Palm Sunday entrance into Jerusalem.

For Linda Johnson, the crucifixion was the incredible pain and suffering that her brothers and sisters have gone through and her not being able to do anything about it. It was being torn apart by the people who didn't want to understand, it was the accusations that she was a Communist, it was the exhaustion of trying to stay in dialogue with those who were so intolerant of her involvement.

Johnson sees the resurrection in a developing community of people in the diocese who understand that part of the call to the Gospel is social justice. "The group is exercising a prophetic voice in this diocese," she said.

She also realizes that the coal miners and their families have not had to suffer through the strike by themselves.

"People from all over the world have been here to lend their support," said Johnson.

A new sense of unity

Rose said that miners and their families now have a much greater sense of connection with working class people because of visits of supporters from Hawaii, California, Poland, the Soviet Union, Italy, Germany, England, Canada and Guatemala.

"There's an intimacy and unity now that has crossed racial, gender and class barriers," noted Rose. "And miners and community folks want to carry on that sense of intimacy and unity by addressing other

issues, such as educational and economic needs."

The Rev. Robert Thacker was one of those arrested for civil disobedience that "Palm Sunday." He described the experience as painful and disrupting but he asserts that he would do it again.

"I learned a lot more about advocacy," said Thacker, who has since resigned from his parish, although not primarily because of his actions on the picket line.

"It's the risk that gives advocacy its strength and power," noted Thacker. "Ultimately it is a personal witness, not an institutional witness. And just like your faith you have to live it out yourself and not let the church do it for you.

In the aftermath of the priests' and laypersons' arrests for civil disobedience, St. John's, Roanoke, the largest parish in the diocese, sponsored a forum so that Episcopalians and the community's residents could hear both sides of the issue. The Rev. Clay Turner, rector, decided on his own to host the forum, because of the time element involved. Those on the vestry and many in his congregation objected.

"People feared that there might be violence, that persons could be injured and the building damaged. Some simply didn't want the church involved in any way and some were just afraid of the unknown," explained Turner.

Despite these objections, Turner hosted the two-hour forum in the church, rather than the parish hall, so the meeting was in the context of offering all the conflict and confusion up to God. The experience became a time of healing in the midst of conflict.

Others involved in the coal strike have had their own personal crucifixion and resurrection.

Bibb Haley, Christ Church, Roanoke, accompanied the miners to the Pittston Company's stockholders' meeting last spring. She said since then she's felt viewed as "some odd fish who's threatened the status quo." People have told her she's acted unwisely, that she really doesn't know what she's doing.

"I'm glad I did it though," Haley said. "Action is important. You

can't just use words to make a witness."

Judy Furr, also a member of Christ Church, Roanoke, was arrested for civil disobedience on the picket line. Her crucifixion came "when the parish support dissolved in my faith crisis."

"I saw those big coal trucks on the picket line and they were scary, but they weren't nearly as inhospitable as the people I faced on the vestry the next day," she recalled.

Bucky Mock, a member of St. Mark's prayer group that invited Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning to the coal fields, sees a lot of good coming out of the church's involvement in the strike.

"As a whole it created friendships and closeness with miners and with lots of church people," he said. "There was hurt, but there was a lot of good out of it too, including more peace and less violence on the picket line."

In the congregations outside the coal fields, the crucifixion came in the aftermath of the clergy's arrest for civil disobedience,

Clergy (wearing their clerical collars) say they were not speaking for the church when arrested for civil disobedience. Rather, their witness was a statement to the church, -- and to society.

However, the Rev. Norman Crews, rector of Emmanuel, Covington, said that even though the intent was to speak to the church, the public's general perception -- and his congregation's -- was that clergy were speaking for the church.

For his congregation, primarily made up of management people living in a union town, the resurrection came during an open vestry meeting during which people had a chance to ventilate. More than one-fourth of the congregation attended.

"The experience showed us that we can come together from an emotional beginning, apply reason and learn that we don't all have to agree," said Crews. "There was never any retaliation such as division within the congregation or a reduction in giving. Rather, we learned we can participate in the church by making our voice heard."

Bishop A. Heath Light was on sabbatical studying biomedical ethics

at the University of Virginia when the people in his diocese became involved in the coal strike.

"Sure it was worth getting involved," he said. "The matter has created both an opportunity and necessity to go back and do some very basic teaching rooted in our baptismal covenant."

Light said that he had sensed a wide divergence of opinion on the church's involvement in social issues. He thought the matter had been resolved theologically, but "obviously it hasn't."

He said that one evidence of the profound discomfort and uneasiness in the church is the fact that an incident such as a coal strike could provoke such polarization that it could be interpreted as a root cause for involuntary termination of rectors.

"I am convinced that the coal strike is more an excuse than a reason, and that the church must look sensitively toward its own life to see what the dynamics are which lead to misinterpretation," said Light. "The coal strike may have provided us the opportunity to hide behind other, deeper issues. On the other hand, such an incident can be the occasion for entering further into such issues."

Mary Lee Simpson is editor of the Southwestern Episcopalian, a newspaper of The Diocese of Southwestern Virginia, with offices in Roanoke.

Photo captions:

1. The Rev. Jim Lewis, from the Diocese of North Carolina, is arrested during the protests.
2. Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning (left) and Bishop Light visit protestors. (Photos by Mary Lee Simpson)

The following statement was issued on February 20, 1990 by the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, the Most Rev Edmond L. Browning, joined by members of his Council of Advice (bishops who are elected presidents or vice-presidents of the nine regional provinces of the church.

We feel called to address issues raised in the ordination, by the Rt Rev John S. Spong of Newark on December 16, 1989, of Robert Williams, a homosexual person living in a public, avowed relationship with a person of the same sex. This statement grows out of extensive consultation, initiated by the Presiding Bishop, throughout the Episcopal Church, particularly with respect to the issues of the accountability of bishops and others in authority to the theological tradition of the church and orderly process in church life.

As bishops of the Province of the Pacific have said, "We do not believe any of us is being responsible with the duties of this office and the polity of this church when one of us acts in such public disregard."

We affirm that the Episcopal Church's position regarding the ordination of practicing gay and lesbian persons is that set forth in a resolution adopted by the 1979 General Convention in which a majority of the bishops and deputies affirmed the following points:

1. There are many human conditions, some of them in the area of sex, which bear upon a person's suitability for ordination;
2. Every ordinand is expected to lead a life which is "a wholesome example to all people" (Book of Common Prayer, pp. 517, 532, 544). There should be no barrier to the ordination of qualified persons of either heterosexual or homosexual orientation whose behavior the church considers wholesome.
3. We reaffirm the traditional teaching of the church on marriage, marital fidelity and sexual chastity as the standard of Christian sexual morality. Candidates for ordination are expected to conform to this standard. Therefore, we believe it is

not appropriate for this church to ordain a practicing homosexual, or any other person who is engaged in heterosexual relations outside of marriage.

Not all members of the church agree with this position, as they did not when the resolution was adopted in 1979. Nevertheless, short of action by the General Convention, it is the stated and authoritative position of the church at this time. Because our society is undergoing a deep reexamination of attitudes about sexuality and intimacy, it is not surprising that this should be an arena where we are likely to find disagreement within the church.

For more than a decade, leaders of the church, through the Commission on Health and Human Affairs, have sought to engage the church in reflecting on a number of issues having to do with sexuality. The work continues. We decry the action by the Bishop of Newark, which, far from furthering that discussion, has polarized our community of faith. What is at stake is the discipline of the church in addressing actions that violate the spirit of our common life. As bishops of the Province of the Midwest have stated:

"The richness of our tradition in part flows from the freedom of inquiry that it encourages and the diversity that it engenders. (However) when persons move beyond the broad parameters of our common life, as expressed through the General Convention resolution..., the seeds of anarchy are sown."

While the choice of fit persons for the sacred ministry is canonically a diocesan responsibility, no one diocese or bishop speaks for the whole church, as this would be contrary to the very nature of our life together as a ecclesial body. In the words of bishops of the Province of the Southwest, "Bishop Spong does not speak or act for ... any diocese other than the Diocese of Newark."

Bishops are called to safeguard the unity of the church, a

responsibility the Newark ordination has seemed to disregard. As the Presiding Bishop and Council of Advice, we disassociate ourselves from the action of the Standing Committee and Bishop of Newark in carrying out this ordination. We regret the hurt and confusion caused for many members of the church by the ordination and by subsequent events. Scandal within the church, whenever and however it may occur, is a profoundly serious matter. We believe that good order is not served when bishops, dioceses, or parishes act unilaterally. We believe that good order is served by adherence to the actions of General Convention.

We must stress here that our "disassociation" is not from the many members our church who are gay and lesbian. Several conventions have affirmed and reaffirmed their God-given dignity, in common with all other members of the body of Christ. We do the same, and value their presence and their service within the church.

Accepting the challenge to be faithful, a challenge shared by all Christians, we call upon you to join with us in recommitting ourselves to the unity of the church and to the mission of Christ, praying that we may grow in our knowledge of him who is "the way, the truth, and the life."

Presiding Bishop: The Most Rev Edmond L Browning

Province I : The Rt Rev Arthur Walmsley

Province II : The Rt Rev O'Kelley Whitaker

Province III : The Rt Rev Arthur Heath Light

Province IV: The Rt Rev William Folwell

Province V : The Rt Rev Edward Jones

Province VI : The Rt Rev William Wolfrum

Province VII : The Rt Rev Herbert Donovan

Province VIII : The Rt Rev Oliver Garver

Province IX : The Rt Rev James Ottley

Statement of Presiding Bishop on the
Release of Nelson Mandela
February 11, 1990

The release of Nelson Mandela is a welcome moment in the history of South Africa and hopefully a watershed moment in the struggle against apartheid. I extend to President de Klerk my gratitude for his leadership and good judgment in taking this action. And I share in the joy of millions of people in South Africa and around the globe that this day has finally come.

I extend to Nelson Mandela my personal greetings and the greetings of the Episcopal Church in the United States. We have prayed and worked with the anti-apartheid movement for many years to see this day arrive, a day that vindicates the right of all South Africans to have full participation in the country of their birth. This is a day for all those who have been a part of the long struggle against apartheid to rejoice and celebrate.

But tomorrow we must be about the task that lies ahead, to join hands in the final wave of energy that will be required to bring down once and for all the evil system that is apartheid. Now must come a renewed commitment to see this struggle through to its just connection.

Now is not the time to ease economic pressures on South Africa. That must come when negotiations for a non-racial, democratic South Africa are clearly irreversible. As we celebrate this day, let us not be premature in thinking that apartheid is all but gone.

I urge all of us engaged in this struggle to be vigilant, and to provide the South African government with the incentives to move with haste to the dismantling of the system that the world abhors. It is a sad but truthful observation that power is rarely given up voluntarily.

Let us encourage President de Klerk to continue on this bold new course. We call now for an end to the state of emergency and the release of all political detainees. And we look to the Parliament to abolish all apartheid laws during its current session so that it can create a conducive climate for negotiations with Mr. Mandela and other legitimate black leadership.

I pray that President de Klerk will have the courage to lead this government to a peaceful transition on the road to a non-racial democratic society. And I pray that it be done swiftly.

The Most Rev. Edmond L. Browning
Presiding Bishop



news briefs

Lutheran World Federation affirms ties with Anglicans

At its eighth assembly, meeting in Brazil recently, the Lutheran World Federation renewed its commitment to the goal of full communion between Lutherans and Anglicans and urged the church bodies to approve 'interim eucharistic sharing' along lines now in effect in North America. The assembly also endorsed a score of possible ways that the two communions could foster "development of common Christian life" between them. General secretary Gunnar Staalsett said the LWF "has not given preference to any one theological or ecclesiological tradition" in its dialogues," adding that "a great web of agreements is being woven in which there is often a remarkable degree of convergence."

Women of Vision Leadership Training Program Expands

The Women of Vision program, developed in 1986 by the Episcopal Church Women in cooperation with the Women in Mission and Ministry Office of the Episcopal Church, will expand its programs. "The enthusiastic response has created demands on the time of presenters far exceeding our expectations," said Ginger Paul, convenor of the management team. In January of 1987 18 women, two from each of the nine provinces, were trained as presenters, who in turn trained others. Today there are 198 presenters and over 2,000 women have participated. A new group will be trained at a special meeting May 31-June 5 at Bishop Mason Conference Center near Dallas. For further information contact Helen Young, 516 Park Way, Piedmont, CA 94611.

Two new bishops elected for the Church of Melanesia

Archbishop Amos Waiaru announced the election of two new bishops for the Church of Melanesia--Michael Tavoia for the Diocese of Vanuatu, and Raymond Aumae for the Diocese of Malaita. Tavoia is from Pentecost Island in Vanuatu and director of the St. Nicholas Christian Resources Development Center in Honiara. Aumae is from Tobaita on Malaita and has served as personal secretary to the archbishop. No consecration dates have been set yet.

National Episcopal AIDS Coalition selects new executive

After a nationwide selection process, William Riggs of Washington, D.C. has been selected as executive of the National Episcopal AIDS Coalition, and assumed his new duties February 14. "He brings the perfect blend of experience in AIDS organizations and in church activities needed to serve our growing grassroots coalition," said NEAC president Thaddeus Bennett. Riggs, a member of St. Columba's Episcopal Church, serves as secretary of the Joint Commission on AIDS and is former president of the Episcopal Caring Response to AIDS, a parish-based service organization offering a full range of AIDS-related activities and ministries. He has been serving as secretary of NEAC.

Namibian constitution approved, independence set for March 21

On February 9 the Constituent Assembly adopted by consensus a constitution for the new Republic of Namibia and will meet on March 20 to elect a new president, setting the stage for an independence celebration on March 21. The constitution, backed by the Namibia Council of Churches, embodies a very comprehensive bill of rights "to protect the individual from possible abuse of power by organs of the state [which] should give our people full confidence in the future of our nation," said Sam Nujoma, head of

the South West African People's Organization and Namibian president-elect. SWAPO dropped its call for a preventative detention clause in the constitution, bowing to demands made by the smaller, ethnically based parties. The matter had been the subject of heated debate, threatening to stall adoption of the constitution. The death penalty was also abolished, under intense lobbying by church groups. The Council of Churches recommended the abolition "as an important sign that the new Namibia displays reverence for life, a respect for humanity, and a rejection of vengeance."

Episcopal Communicators meets as part of Communications Congress

Veteran PBS commentator Bill Moyers will highlight the opening banquet of the Religious Communications Congress (RCC 90) meeting in Nashville on April 18. Moyers will speak on "The Power of the Media to Shape Values," and he will preview his new documentary, "Amazing Grace," to be shown this fall on PBS. The congress brings together an array of communications groups from different church bodies, including the Episcopal Communicators. Deadline for registrations at a discounted rate is now March 15.

Latino seminarians form national collective

Latino seminarians from throughout the country met recently in Austin, Texas, and formed a national collective. "We hope to nurture each other as we continue to explore our mission as Latino seminarians and clergy within the Episcopal Church," said the Rev. Anthony Guillen from the Diocese of Western Mexico, a student at Seminary of the Southwest. Members of the group plan to develop "a theology relevant to the needs of our Latino communities in the United States which, for the most part, are

poor, disenfranchised, and voiceless," he said. The 16-member collective will include Mexican-American, Central American, and Puerto Rican students.

Momentum for Middle East peace may be growing

Church leaders and Middle East experts meeting at a Convocation for Peace in the Middle East at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City agreed that a new momentum for peace may be developing among opposing factions in Israel, although intransigent Israeli government policy and a lagging U.S. policy aren't making the search for peace any easier. Several speakers expressed the fear that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will get lost amid the momentous events taking place in Eastern Europe and South Africa. The Rev. J. Bryan Hehir of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops said there is now a "moment of opportunity" because there has been movement on the part of Palestinians and even other Arabs. "But the moment won't be grasped by Israel without outside help, and outside help includes the United States." He said that churches can help by urging the U.S. government to "move on the Middle East question."

Nicaraguans heading for the polls to choose leaders

In what may be the most observed elections in history, the people of Nicaragua are headed for the polls February 25 to choose a president, national assembly, and local leaders. Over 3,000 international election observers and 1,500 journalists are part of the election process. A number of Episcopalians are joining different delegations. An Episcopal Peace Fellowship/Witness for Peace group is one of the denominational groups and includes Episcopalians from around the nation. Jeffrey Penn of the news staff is a member of that delegation and will file his report for the next ENS. Patti Browning, Bishop

Frank Griswold of Chicago, and Diane Porter are members of a delegation centered in Managua, and we will include their observations in our news account.

Hawaii church recognized for work with mentally ill

Hawaii's state mental health division recently recognized St. Christopher's Episcopal Church in Kailua for its 30 years of work with the mentally ill. In presenting the church with the first distinguished service award, it called the record "remarkable." Lois Meyer, a nurse and volunteer, said that "there is still a stigma attached to mental illness. People who don't understand will feel embarrassed, ashamed, and frightened." She said the volunteers were in it for the long haul. "Patients know that people from St. Christopher's are very durable. We're gonna keep coming back because we really care about them." The congregation's work was featured in a workshop, "When Mental Illness Strikes a Person of Faith," co-sponsored by the Hawaii Council of Churches and the Hawaii Department of Health.

